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Summary

Chapter I: New Developments

“An aborigine converted to Christianity means the loss of his aboriginal culture” is a widely used slogan that has found a ready audience among Taiwanese aborigine people since the first decade of this century. This study can be considered a first attempt to answer this vital question: Is it, historically speaking, fair to blame Christianity for the loss of aboriginal culture? I hope that this study can help to put this accusation in a different, more nuanced light.

Therefore, it is important to reinvestigate missionary activities in the seventeenth century and learn from them. I focus upon the first encounter between the Reformed faith and aboriginal tradition during the period of Dutch control over Formosa (Taiwan) in the seventeenth century. The seventeenth-century Formosan church was one of the first successful missionary endeavors by the Netherlands Reformed Church. Dutch missionaries first went to Amboina where several obstacles, such as a lack of people willing to serve, rendered their attempts at missionary work in the beginning futile. In comparison, the Formosan church was not only able to convert great numbers of inhabitants to the Christian faith; they also established schools, consistories, and a seminary in less than three decades. Because of this remarkable historical fact, this study explores the following question: *What were the unique characteristics of the Formosan church (1624-1662) in the context of the Netherlands Reformed Church's mission expansion?* I hope that my account of these characteristics can help to nuance the above-mentioned accusation.

I intend to investigate Dutch mission history from a Taiwanese perspective. But is it possible to establish a Taiwanese perspective on the basis of Dutch sources? My answer to this methodological question is the following.

First, it is plausible that the Dutch *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company, VOC) employees were the exclusive writers of all accounts about native people in Formosa. Their accounts of native culture and religion were the collaborations between the Dutch colonizers and the native Formosans. Therefore, all of the accounts should be regarded as the common heritage of both the Dutch and the Formosans since they contain the combined perspective of the two sides. Second, there were several accounts on Formosan culture and religion by different writers when the VOC ruled Formosa during the seventeenth century. One may, therefore, compare all available accounts and pick out the common elements from different writers. The essential cultural elements of Formosan aboriginal culture and beliefs that might give an unbiased picture of Formosan culture are thus brought together. Third, a number of dictionaries, such as Dutch-Sirayan and Favorlang-Dutch

dictionaries, also reveal the native perspective to a certain degree in significant ways.

Chapter II: Antonius Walaeus and the Seminarium Indicum

The VOC board realized the importance of the missionary task already one year after its establishment in the Netherlands, as mentioned in the resolution taken on February 27, 1603. This resolution not only embraces missionary activity as part of the company's obligations, it also assumes that the missionaries should attempt to convert Catholics, Muslims, and adherents of pagan religions. The VOC established the Seminarium Indicum in 1622 to train seminary students for service in the East Indies, either as ministers for Dutch congregations or as missionaries among the natives. This seminary only lasted ten years, but its graduates played a significant role as ministers in Dutch congregations in the East Indies or as missionaries within various East Indian contexts. Antonius Walaeus, the director of the Seminarium Indicum, was a Contra-Remonstrant who played a significant role at the Synod of Dort. He did not, however, stress the doctrine of predestination or the Heidelberg Catechism in the seminary's curriculum. Instead, the practice of piety and a passion for the expansion of Christianity were his major concerns. The students who graduated from the Seminarium Indicum not only received a general training but were also equipped with the practice of piety learned from Walaeus and received a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the East Indies learned from Sebastiaan Danckaerts. This explains why Candidius and Rogerius wrote anthropological reports as soon as they were able to speak the local language and why Junius and Vertrecht compiled contextualized catechisms for educational purposes. They must have learned how to do this either from personal contact with Danckaerts or from his books on the East Indies. Because of this training, the Seminarium Indicum students developed a more realistic picture of life in the East Indies. Therefore, they had a better idea of the most effective way for missionary work.

Chapter III. The Establishment of the Formosan Church

The history of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Formosa is an excellent example of a successful mission, not only in terms of its fruitful outcome, recorded in contemporary reports, but also with respect to its uniqueness as one of the earliest missionary activities of the Dutch. David Bosch even defines the Formosan mission as the first example of Dutch overseas missions. Looking at the whole history of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Formosa, a peculiar phenomenon can be observed: Candidius and Junius did the most to expand the Christian church in Formosa, including the planting of new churches and the baptizing of converts. Although later missionaries also planted churches in new areas that came under Dutch control, they

did not baptize a single convert! This means that the history of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Formosa can be divided into two different periods characterized by two different outlooks. The first period featured ministers with missionary zeal under whose leadership the church expanded dramatically, while the second period featured missionaries who were less fervent and whose main goal was merely to keep the existing mission churches afloat.

From the available sources, one can discover several difficult problems that the Dutch missionaries had to tackle. The first was the Sirayans' different concept of sin; the second was the significant role the Sirayan priestesses (*inibs*) played in the villagers' minds and lives. The third problem was the Sirayan religion and its practices, including the festival activities and taboos that dominated their daily lives. These three problems were interwoven into one compact system that the missionaries had to unravel by innovation or by applying political pressure if necessary. The catechisms compiled by these missionaries reveal the concepts and methods they used in this pagan context.

Political turmoil was not a lasting difficulty, given that the Sinckandians embraced the Dutch as allies in 1631 and were willing to accept the Christian faith. They even went as far as to alter their social structure by accepting a Dutch appointee as their ruler in 1636, during the first *landdag* ceremony. The struggle between the Christian faith and the native religion proved to be a lasting challenge, not only for Candidius but also for all the succeeding missionaries in Formosa. In fact, this problem would be left to his successor Robertus Junius to deal with.

Junius' achievements during his 14 years of service in Formosa reveals that a comprehensive scheme or vision for mission work lay behind his various activities. The focal point of his missionary work was not merely to baptize a great number of converts but to establish a church that was not only equipped with a solid Christian faith but was also self-sustaining, independent, and on an equal footing with the churches in the Netherlands. In other words, Junius attempted to plant a church in Formosa that could communicate as an equal with its European mother church. For this purpose, he established schools, compiled contextualized catechisms, arranged programs for training native schoolteachers, implored the VOC administration to send native youth to study theology in the Netherlands, and established a native Soulang Consistory. All these activities were merely means to achieve his overall mission vision.

Generally speaking, during the period after Junius' departure (1643), the most significant geographical expansion of the Formosan mission was the successful planting of the church in Favorlang in central Formosa during the early 1640s and in Kelung and Tamsui in northern Formosa in 1655. None of the later missionaries

managed it to plant new churches. There was some expansion, but this was simply due to VOC's territorial expansion. The ministers after 1643 did not focus on evangelism but on translating and modifying the essential teachings of the Netherlands Reformed Church. They believed this was the most adequate means at that time to strengthen the faith of the Sirayan Christians. These ministers left several significant works, including translations of parts of Scripture, a modified Heidelberg Catechism, and several catechisms in the Favorlang language.

Despite their diligent translation work, they made no efforts to make new converts. In other words, the later missionaries lacked evangelistic zeal. The most obvious evidence for this observation is that from 1644 until 1662, when the Dutch left Formosa, these ministers had not baptized a single native! The second period of mission work in Formosa was marred by two significant controversies. One was a dispute between Junius and the later missionaries in the late 1640s, while the second controversy was between Rev. Daniel Gravius and governor Nicolaes Verburg. The significance of the first controversy is that it highlights the difficulty of communicating the Christian faith within a different cultural context. In other words, does a missionary in a foreign land with a strange culture have to embrace the new context of his mission or should he retreat to his own European context? Junius realized the necessity of adaptation in order to make the Christian message known to people whose cultural background was completely different from his own. As this controversy clearly shows, those who succeeded him thought it was better to retreat to the Dutch Reformed tradition.

They presumed that, by doing so, they would establish a solid foundation for the Christian church in Formosa. Consequently, they utilized the structure and content of the Heidelberg Catechism and wrote prodigious explanations for each catechism question so that Formosan converts might be able to grasp the fine points of Calvinism. Both parties realized that the newly converted Formosan Christians needed a solid foundation for their Christian faith, and both were also convinced that contextualization was an important method for Christian nurture. On the other hand, their concepts of contextualization were totally different. These different ideas about contextualization dictated the form and content of the two different catechisms (they still exist today), namely the *Formulier der Vraachstukken* and the *Formulier des Christendoms*.

Chapter IV: Christian Contextualization

Reformed missionaries compiled various catechisms. Some are missing, but others are still in circulation. The content of these catechisms reveal significant insights in the missiological and theological positions of the seventeenth-century Netherlands

Reformed Church. We found that there were several phases of, or shifts in, catechism usage. Candidius initially introduced Aldegonde's catechism or *Kort Begryp* into Formosa, which was used by Formosan Christians for a period of time. Robertus Junius altered and transformed this catechism into a contextualized *Formulier der Vraachstukken* consisting of 80 questions and answers, which he later expanded into a larger catechism, the *Groote Vraachstukken*, consisting of 353 questions. He used this catechism as teaching material when instructing 50 native students training to be teachers. In this larger catechism, Junius extensively discusses certain questions that he presumes to be essential for native teachers in their future work.

In 1648 a shift in attitude occurred. The Formosan Consistory decided to take the Dutch catechism (Heidelberg Catechism) as a model for another version. Simon van Breen (first and second parts) and Rev. Happart (third part) did not merely translate the original text but made an amplified version by adding "a certain number of short, clear, and succinct questions." The final version still exists as *'t Formulier des Christendoms met de Verklaringen van dien inde Sideis-Formosaansche Tale*. It was published in 1662, the year Koxinga (Chen Cheng-kung) expelled the VOC from Formosa. This catechism had already been widely used by Formosan Christians since the late 1640s and had been compiled as a result of a controversy between Junius and the Formosa Consistory concerning the cause of the decline of the Formosan church during the late 1640s.

Even though the author could have included some discussions on Sirayan religious or cultural elements in his doctrinal analysis, none of them can be found in the *'t Formulier des Christendoms*. The reason *why* he does not is most likely that he thought it would be better to transform Formosans from pagan aborigines into "Dutch Christians" than into "Formosan Christians" in their own right.

Chapter V. Conclusion

We can list three characteristics in response to the research question: *What were the unique characteristics of the Formosan church (1624-1662) in the context of the expansion of the mission of the Netherlands Reformed Church?*

First, seventeenth-century Formosa was not the first place the Netherlands Reformed Church established churches abroad. But it was in Formosa that the first full scale missionary activity by Dutch Calvinist ministers took place. From the time of Georgius Candidius on, ministers lived among the aborigines, converting and educating the local people, compelled not only by their own missionary zeal but also encouraged by Dutch governors. Therefore, the ministers who graduated from the Seminarium Indicum did not identify themselves as chaplains of the VOC administration but as missionaries dedicated to the Great Commission. Formosa may

be called the first real mission field of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Second, the Dutch ministers who served there can be divided roughly into two distinct groups as far as their approach towards the aborigines was concerned. The first group adopted a contextualized approach. The ministers who adopted this approach, like Junius and Vertrecht, saw their efforts rewarded with fruitful results. The second group adopted a “Hollandization” approach (namely, trying to convert the natives into Asian “Hollanders”), believing that this approach would yield more fruitful results than the contextualization approach. They translated the New Testament and compiled a Formosan version of the Heidelberg Catechism: *’t Formulier des Christendoms*. Their approach was significant in that it brought Calvinist theology and biblical teaching to the Formosan Church.

Third, even though the Dutch were expelled by Koxinga in 1662, the legends of Dutch red-haired relatives never disappeared. The first people to embrace the Gospel preached by nineteenth-century English missionaries were the descendents of Sirayan people. Because of this, Calvinist theology was able to take root again in Formosan soil after two centuries. In the 1960s, aboriginal tribes presented an even more brilliant testimony of God’s mercy in Taiwan. Nearly 80% of aboriginal tribes converted from their traditional religion to the Christian faith. Because of this, Lillian Dickson, an American missionary in Taiwan at that time, called it “the miracle of the 20th century.”

Therefore, the answer to the accusation by the Aboriginal Revival Movement that “An aborigine converted to Christianity means the loss of his aboriginal culture” must be nuanced. Indeed, it does not sketch a fair image of the seventeenth-century Dutch mission. Candidius wrote an extensive anthropological report on Sirayan social and cultural life that enables Sirayan descendents nowadays to grasp something of their ancestors’ social, cultural, and religious context. From Junius’ or Vertrecht’s catechism, contemporary scholars can derive a glimpse of the mindset of seventeenth-century Sirayan and Favorlang people.

Epilogue

The course of the Formosan history after Koxinga’s invasion is sketched in the first part. In the second part some indications of the continuing impact of the Christian presence are mentioned. It seems likely that, under the influence of the Christian presence in Formosa, Sirayan religion changed from polytheism into monotheism. Missionaries also contributed considerably to Sirayan culture. They stimulated the replacement of the calendar system and introduced many Christian terms into Sirayan vocabulary. Indirectly, it is to their credit that the Sirayans retained the ability to write for more than 150 years. This ability especially protected aboriginal land rights from

Chinese immigrants. Even now many land rights are written in the Romanized Sirayan language. All these factors are indications of the remaining influence of the Christian presence in Formosa.